News Release
Communiqué

Ontario

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS EVALUATION OF A NEW CANCER TREATMENT

Provides More Than $5.1 Million To University Health Network To Conduct Evaluation

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is funding a two-year evaluation of photopheresis, a new cancer treatment that will benefit some bone marrow transplant patients or people with an advanced form of lymph node cancer, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Our government supports the study of new and emerging treatments, so we can be sure patients have access to innovative and safe care," said Smitherman. "This evaluation will determine the best use of this treatment and how we can improve quality of life for this group of patients and increase access to services while staying close to home."

Photopheresis will specifically benefit bone marrow transplant patients who have chronic graft-versus-host-disease and have not benefited from other treatments. It will also benefit patients with advanced treatment-resistant Cutaneous T Cell Lymphoma.

Based on recommendations from the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee that further study is needed on photopheresis, the government is providing the University Health Network (UHN) with more than $5.1 million in funding to conduct a field evaluation. The hospital began accepting patients this month and it's expected that approximately 50 patients will be treated each year.

"As the home of the largest stem cell transplant program in the province and a leading cancer centre, we're pleased to be the site for this new and emerging treatment," said Dr. Catherine Zahn, Executive Vice President of Clinical Programs and Practice, UHN. "Patients are expected to benefit by having photopheresis available in Ontario, and through the integration of photopheresis into our cancer and stem cell transplant programs."

Under this treatment, a photopheresis machine withdraws a quantity of blood from a patient in a manner similar to dialysis. The machine separates the blood into red blood cells, white blood cells, and plasma. The white blood cells are treated with methoxsalen (a light-activated drug) and irradiated with ultraviolet light within the machine before being combined with the other native blood components and returned to the patient.

"For too long, this particular group of patients and their families have had to endure long trips to other provinces, such as Alberta, or to the United States for lifesaving therapy," said Smitherman. "Making photopheresis treatment available in Ontario gives new hope to patients suffering from these life threatening complications."

This is just the latest example of the McGuinty government's commitment to fighting cancer. Other initiatives include:

- Providing more than $356 million in base and one-time funding for cancer drug treatments covered under the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's New Drug Funding Program since 2004/05
- Investing approximately $16 million in new incremental chemotherapy and radiation treatment therapy funding in 2006/07
- Improving cancer care for women by investing in new technology and equipment for cervical screening.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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For more information on achievements in health care, visit: www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca.

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ONTARIO HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee (OHTAC) is the single portal for providing advice to the health care system, including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), regarding the use and distribution of new health technologies and the removal of obsolete health technologies.

OHTAC's mandate includes:

- Examining proposed health technologies in the context of existing clinical practice.
- Providing advice and recommendations to MOHLTC, practitioners and the broader health care system based on a systematic, objective, evidence-based technology assessment and taking into account economic, human resource, regulatory and ethical considerations
- Creating a forum to maximize opportunities and prioritize the uptake and diffusion of new / emerging health technologies deemed to significantly improve patient outcomes and/or systems efficiencies relative to other existing or competing interventions.
- Outlining implications for implementing its recommendations including the impact on the public, society, health care sectors and professions
- Providing advice regarding the field evaluation of technologies deemed to be potentially useful but for which there is inadequate existing quality evidence to support multi-million dollar, multi-year investments.
- Providing transparency regarding its recommendations and the analyses upon which these recommendations are made to Ontario's health care system

OHTAC does not:

- Examine or provide recommendations for pharmaceutical products or information systems
- Engage in general disease management reviews but rather the integration of technologies related to specific diseases and conditions
- Infringe upon the important role of innovation through health research

OHTAC produces E-Bulletins to provide updates on the latest committee recommendations. They are available at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/mas/bulletins/bul_mn.html

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